



Immaculate Conception Church

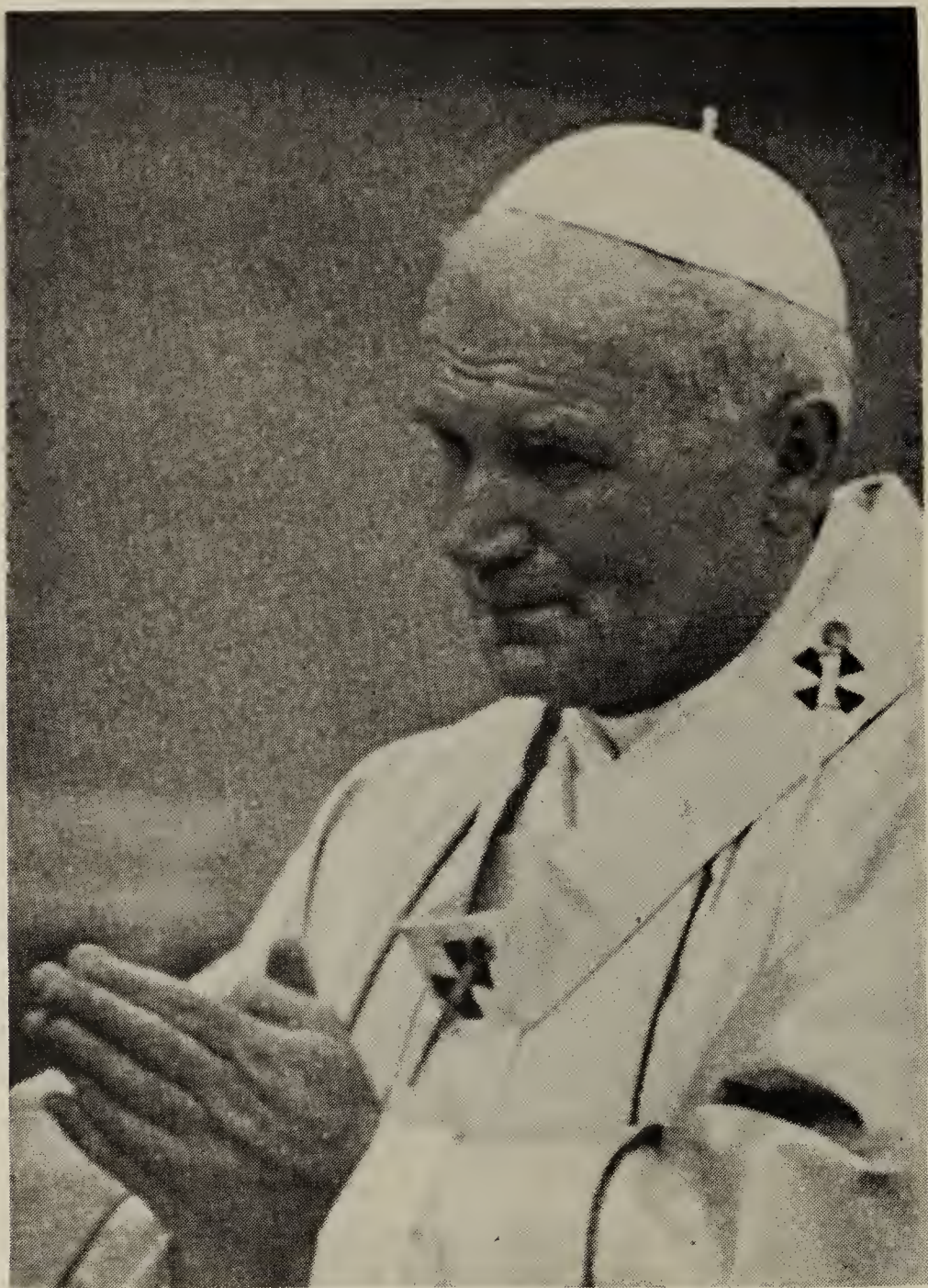
Shelbyville, Illinois

Dedication August 27, 1879

***Most Rev. Peter Joseph Baltes
Bishop of Alton***

Centennial August 26, 1979

***Most Rev. Joseph McNicholas
Bishop of Springfield***



Pope John Paul II



3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

June 25, 1979

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dear Father Sohm:

It is my privilege to inform you that the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, imparts his Apostolic Blessing on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Dedication of the present church of the Immaculate Conception in Shelbyville, Illinois. This favor is to embrace all who comprise the Immaculate Conception community as well as those who will join in the Jubilee celebration on August 27, 1979.

During a recent pastoral visit to a parish in Rome, the Holy Father reminded those present that "Parish means Christ's presence among men. The parish means a set of persons, it means a community in which and with which Jesus Christ reconfirms the presence of God. The parish is a living part of the People of God."

The Holy Father is grateful to God for the many gifts which have allowed Immaculate Conception to flourish as a parish family for a century. As the future is embraced with hope, His Holiness prays that the Immaculate Conception community will consciously strengthen the bonds of faith, worship, and love which it shares with the universal Church. In particular may it be one with the Pope whose "special love is with the poor, the sick, and the suffering."

I wish to join my personal congratulations and prayers to those of the Holy Father. Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of the Church, may you all grow until reaching perfection in Christ.

With kind and cordial regards, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Jean Tardif

Apostolic Delegate

Reverend John E. Sohm
Pastor: Immaculate Conception Church
Shelbyville, Illinois



Most Rev. Joseph McNicholas
Bishop of Springfield



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524 East Lawrence Avenue
Post Office Box 1667
Springfield, Illinois 62705

Area Code 217
Telephone 522-7781

August 8, 1979

Dear Parishioners,

What a joy to celebrate with you
the Centennial of the dedication of
your devotional parish church.

Each of my visits to Shelbyville
have been wonderfully happy and pleasant
occasions. The spirit of your parish,
under the leadership of your zealous
pastor, Father Sohm, is inspirational.

May God continue to bless the parish
community abundantly. Finally, in this,
the 125th Anniversary of the formal
definition of Mary's Immaculate Conception,
I beg her to keep you, the parishioners
of Immaculate Conception, always in her
love.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

† Joseph A. Mc Nicholas
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

Dear Parishioners:

While any one hundredth anniversary is an occasion to be marked, the dedication centenary of a church calls for a special celebration. For one hundred years countless people have offered "sincere worship and found God's saving love in this church" (from Mass for anniversary of dedication).

Our thoughts return to August 26, 1879: we imagine the joy that filled the hearts of the parishioners as the new Church of the Immaculate Conception was dedicated. For a century it has endured as the fruit of their devotion and sacrifice. How grateful we are for this heritage!

But above all we offer thanks to God, in whose providence our church was stood firm for these one hundred years. This has been but one sign of His favor to our parish.

With Mary our patroness we pray that the power of God's word and sacraments may continue to bring strength to the people gathered in Immaculate Conception Church.

Father John John

Parish Beginings

From about the time the first log cabin was constructed in Shelbyville in 1825 and for the next quarter of a century, there is no evidence of Catholics living in the area. On October 11, 1849, the Bishop of Chicago, Bishop Van de Velde, passed through Shelbyville, and found only one Catholic in residence at the time, a native of Lorraine, France.

By 1854, the situation had changed somewhat, as Catholic families in Shelbyville gathered together in private homes to participate in Mass offered by three priests from Decatur: Father Michael Prendergast, Father Thomas Cusack and Father Anthony Vogt. They were from St. Patrick Church, and rarely made the trip, because it was for the most part very complicated. From Decatur the priest would have to ride horseback to Mattoon. After Mass in Mattoon, section hands brought him to Shelbyville to offer Mass, and then he went from Shelbyville to Pana. The trip back was through Shelbyville and Mattoon, and from there to Decatur, again by horse. In a church history of St. Patrick Parish in Decatur, Father Vogt's missionary zeal is noted. Shelbyville was one of the farthest stops on his swing around Decatur, and it was noted the trip took six hours by buggy. This likely was one reason that Mass was celebrated infrequently in Shelbyville.

Father Vogt was instrumental in helping the Catholic families of Shelbyville to construct their first church, and later assisted Father Thomas Cusack from 1862 to 1865 at the new church. Before that first church was built, Mass was offered in the home of a Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who lived in an area of town that used to be known as Moulton. This is presently in the vicinity of South Ninth Street. When more families started attending Mass, the meeting place was moved to larger accommodations at the brick home of Bob O'Brien. His home was located two blocks north of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's. Again the location was moved to a larger log house known as the Butler Hotel. This new home of the Shelbyville Catholic families was located on South First Street. Because the number of Catholics attending Mass increased, it was decided to build a permanent church.

First Church Structure

The ground for the first Catholic church was donated to the parish by Daniel and Priscilla Earp. This property was deeded to Bishop Henry Damien Junkers of Alton (Lot 10 - Block 3, Earps Second Addition, October 5, 1861). To help give the building fund a boost, the Earps also donated \$500 for construction of the church. Records show this plot currently as 319 West South First Street. Henry and Robert O'Brien were the contractors for the building, with Harrison Hart the carpenter, and a Mr. Riley the plasterer.



The interior of Immaculate Conception has undergone several renovation over the past century. Prior to a 1964 remodeling (right), the sanctuary looked like the top photo. The photo to the right was taken following a major remodeling and the photo below was taken prior to the renovation this summer.



A description of this first church was written by Miss Jane Pollard shortly before her death at age 88 in 1948. She relates that at the rear of the church, just inside the main entrance, was a spacious vestry. In it was a large wardrobe made of walnut, holding the vestments and other sacred furnishings used at Mass. The church has four large frosted white windows. The pews were constructed of white pine, and the communion railing was walnut. The altar in the church was small, but beautiful, with a picture of the Virgin Mother hung behind the large crucifix. The organ in the balcony was in good condition, and the bell in constant use.

First Pastor, Congregation

From 1862, when the new structure was completed, until 1865, Father Vogt, assisted by Father Thomas Cusack, who seems to have resided in Shelbyville at least for a time, continued to serve the Catholic families of Shelbyville. If Father Cusack was not the first official resident pastor, Father Julian Turnell who came to Shelbyville in 1865, certainly deserved that distinction. There were fifteen families in the parish at this time, and henceforth it enjoyed the benefit of a resident pastor. The little frame church was sufficient for the needs of the parish until the late 1870's. By this time there were some thirty five families, from Shelbyville and towns in the surrounding area, and a new church was needed.

New Church Constructed

In July, 1877, two plots of land, bordering on Washington and North First Streets, were donated to Bishop Peter Joseph Baltes: one by General William Fitzhugh Thornton, the other by his daughter, Eliza T. Holloway. Mr. J. Thornton Herrick, member of the parish, is a great, great grandson of the general. Ground was broken in 1878. Miss Pollard states that Mr. Flowers was carpenter, Mr. Donnelly plasterer, and Mr. Reisacher brick-mason. These men were also trustees of the parish. The new Church of the Immaculate Conception was dedicated on August 27, 1879, by The Most Reverend Peter Joseph Baltes, D.D., Bishop of the Diocese of Alton. He was assisted by a number of priests from neighboring towns. Father John Storp had initiated the building program and became the first pastor of the new church. Near the east end of the church a two-story building was erected, housing a parochial school and convent. Three sisters, Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, from Fort Wayne, Indiana, staffed the school, which was established through the great effort of Father Storp. Unfortunately, however, it was not self-supporting, and within two years was disbanded.

The original church on South First Street no longer exists, but the rectory still stands, and is in use as a private residence.

According to a city directory published in 1879-80, Mass was



During the turn of the century many families come to church and brought a picnic lunch and spent the day. This photo was taken during Fr. Heslin's pastorate, 1913-19.



Msgr. Herrick



Sr. Annie Biser



Sr. Ann Holloway



Sr. Mary Rita Domas

offered on Sunday at 10 a.m., sabbath school at 2 p.m. and vespers at 3 p.m. Older parishioners recall stories of their families from surrounding areas bringing lunch and spending the day at the church.

The basic architectural style of the new church was Gothic, utilizing the arch. Small archways separate the vestibule from the nave. Another arch is located over the sanctuary, with two smaller arches over the original side-altar niches. Sister Mary Rita, a Poor Clare, remembers a magnificent painting that adorned the ceiling in 1904, and a statue of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother standing near the Communion railing. The Spracklen families in the parish are her close relatives.

Fire Destroys Bell Tower

In 1912 sparks from a nearby burning building ignited the church, severely damaging the roof and central bell tower. Repair resulted in shortening of the tower and removal of the bell, as well as elimination of the center steeple and twin spires. In early years there was a small picket fence across the front yard, and the doors of the church were wooden.

On April 21, 1946, the Wicks pipe organ, still in use, was presented to the church by James W. Rice in memory of his sister, Elizabeth Rice Pollard.

In 1949, during Father Master-son's pastorate, the men dug a basement beneath the church. In this parish hall for over twenty five years the ladies of the St. Rita Altar

Society served supper for the weekly Kiwanis Club meeting, as well as the meal for the monthly meeting of the county lawyers for ten years. Proceeds were used for parish expenses, most notably the cost of the Parish School of Religion.

While Father Bloomfield was pastor, the porch at the rectory entrance was enclosed with glass. He also undertook an interior remodeling in 1964. A new altar and new pews were installed, and side altars were replaced by life-size statues of Mary and Joseph (with child Jesus). Shortly thereafter a free-standing altar was placed in the sanctuary, facilitating the celebration of Mass with priest facing the congregation.

The church was air conditioned in 1972.

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the church's dedication another remodeling and decoration has been completed as designed by Architectural Bronze Studios, Inc., St. Louis, Mo. Parishioners did the plastering, painting, carpentry and electrical work.

Church's Vocations

One member of Immacualte Conception Church has been ordained to the priesthood. Monsignor Joseph Caudell Herrick, born in Shelbyville on May 6, 1874, was ordained at Dunwoodie Seminary, Yonkers, New York. Having spent his priestly life in New York, he died on September 7, 1959, and is buried in Calvary Cemetery, St. Louis, Missouri. Monsignor Herrick was a great

Pastors
1875 to
1979



Fr. John Storp



Fr. Henry Joseph Hoven



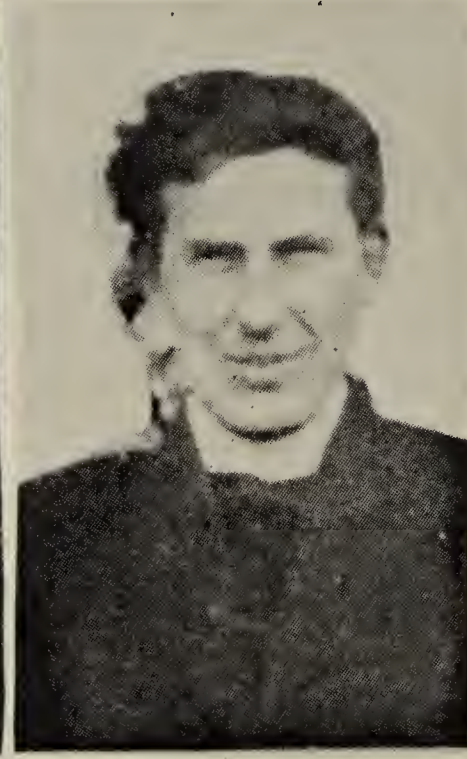
Fr. August J. Sauer



Fr. William A. Heffernan



Fr. Herman Gesenhues



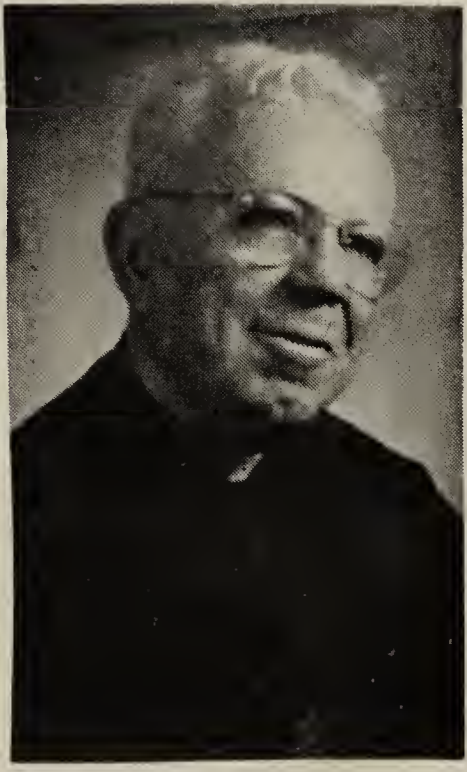
Fr. John M. Heslin



Fr. Timothy McKeogh



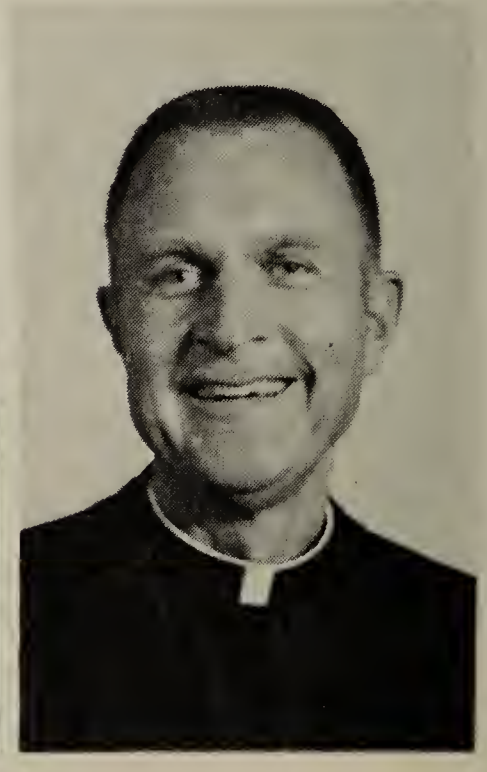
Fr. Peter J. Masterson
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Fr. Matthew C. Malley



Fr. William E. Bloomfield



Fr. John E. Sohm

grandson of General Thornton.

Eight women of the parish have entered religious life: Anna Holloway, Anna Murphy, Clara Mongene, Anna O'Ruick, Viola Domas, Norene Delaney, Margaret Delaney, and Betty Dwyer.

When the present church was built, it served 35 families for many years and did not grow beyond 40 families. Currently over 150 families are registered in the parish whose radius is some ten miles. The majority of these live in Shelbyville; approximately one-fifth of the parishioners come from the surrounding rural area and adjacent towns, some as far away as fifteen miles. From Spring through Autumn many visitors come to the Shelbyville area to take advantage of the recreational benefits of Lake Shelbyville. During these months an additional Mass is offered each Sunday to accommodate them.

The Parish School of Religion is directed by the Dominican Sisters from the Confraternity Center at Arcola. They provide weekly religious instruction for 68 children, grades 1 through 12. Also during the school year women of the parish conduct a weekly pre-school for children ages 4 to 5.

Pastors

Twenty-four priests have served as pastor of Immaculate Conception Church since 1859:

Father Anthony Vogt	1859
Father Thomas Cusack	1863
Father Anthony Vogt (again)	1864
Father Julian Turnell	1865
Father M. Quinlan	1872
Father John Adolphus Jacque	1873

Father John Storp	1875
Father Henry Joseph Hoven	1881
Father August J. Sauer	1891
Father John R. Mahoney	1893
Father James Joseph Dougherty	1893
Father J.M.J. Reade	1897
Father Francis B. Kehoe	1898
Father William A. Heffernan	1899
Father James Vincent Martin	1901
Father Patrick Loughney	1903
Father Herman Gesenhues	1905
Father John M. Heslin	1913
Father Michael Crowley	1919
Father Timothy McKeogh	1919
Father Lawrence H. Winking	1924
Father Peter J. Masterson	1929
Father Matthew C. Malley	1955
Father William Edwin Bloomfield	1961
Father John E. Sohm	1971

Centennial Ceremony

On Sunday, August 26, 1979, Immaculate Conception Parish celebrated the centenary of the church's dedication. At 7:30 p.m. Bishop Joseph A. McNicholas offered the anniversary Mass, assisted by Father John E. Sohm and Father Matthew C. Malley. Father Raymond Franzen, Dean, and priests of the Decatur deanery attended. Mass servers were Gary Hayden, Jesse Helton and Robert Simmering. Lectors were Mr. Eugene Uptmor and Mrs. Debbie Phillips. Providing accompaniment for the congregational singing were organist Sister James Marie, O.P., and guitarists Mr. William Livergood and Mrs. Rose Thompson. After Mass the St. Rita Altar Society served refreshments at a reception in the church hall.



*Immaculate Conception Church
Shelbyville, Illinois
1879 - 1979*

O Mary, glorious Virgin blessed,
All creatures you by far excel;

From taint of sin you were secure
Since grace in you did fully dwell.

What we by Adam's sin had lost
by bearing Christ you did restore.

That we might grace again receive
And entry gain to heaven's door.

You are the gate through which the King
has come to us in splendor bright.

Let all the nations praises sing,
Because through you came Life and Light.

O Jesus, glory be to you,
The Son of Mary, Virgin true,

And to the Father, God above,
To Holy Spirit, God of love. Amen!

